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# HELPING LOW-INCOME FAMILIES IMPROVE THEIR DIETS //

U.S. Extension Service • U.S. Department of Agriculture • May 1974





More than five million of the approximately 50 million U.S. families have incomes below the poverty level. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is concerned about these families. Through the Cooperative Extension Service and food assistance programs, USDA is helping to improve their diets.

Since 1968, Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) has enrolled and taught more than 900,000 low-income homemakers how to improve their diets, shop wisely for food, and use resources. More than a million low-income youth have been enrolled in 4-H nutrition education activities.

Program aides—more than 22,000 employed since EFNEP began—are trained and supervised by Extension home economists to teach adults. Many have used their valuable Extension training and experience to go on to higher paying, more responsible jobs. Currently, there are 8,000 aides.

Youth are taught by volunteers trained by 4-H youth professionals. Since the EFNEP phase of 4-H began in 1970, over 110,000 volunteers have participated.

About one-third of Extension's 4,000 local home economics staff members and hundreds of 4-H professionals are involved in EFNEP.

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# EFNEP: PEOPLE ON THE GO

## Families and Youth

A low-income Virginia family with 12 children was eating mostly starches—oatmeal, bread, and rice. An EFNEP aide showed the homemaker how to use meats, meat alternates, and vegetables in economical casseroles and other dishes. Pride had kept the homemaker from using food stamps. With the aide's encouragement, she enrolled in the food stamp program. Now her family is enjoying a better diet and a better life.

An Iowa EFNEP aide won the confidence of a homemaker who had not permitted others to enter her home. This homemaker has two severely retarded children and wanted to protect her privacy. The aide taught her about nutrition and food buying and encouraged her to plant a garden and do some home canning. Gardening took the homemaker outdoors near her neighbors. She began to socialize with people again. Now the EFNEP aide is inviting the mother to join a study group so that she can continue her learning and make new friends.



How do children understand where milk comes from, if they've never seen a cow? An Alaskan EFNEP home economist decided to help low-income children in her remote area learn about cows, milk, and nutrition. With the support of school and health officials, a campaign was organized to rent a cow from a farm near Anchorage. Students raised the money needed to fly the cow to town and feed it for a week. The cow created a sensation. Adults and children came to see it and learn how important milk is to their diets. Everyone agreed this was the highlight of spring school activities.

Teaching nutrition and judo at the same time may seem an unlikely idea. Polk County, Oregon teenagers know better. Through the imaginative efforts of their EFNEP youth coordinator, weekly 15-minute nutrition lessons are followed by judo classes. Students learn to plan, select, and prepare nutritious snacks. Judo-nutrition classes are popular with both boys and girls. Grownups feel this is a meaningful after-school program, especially appreciated in a small town where not many activities are offered.



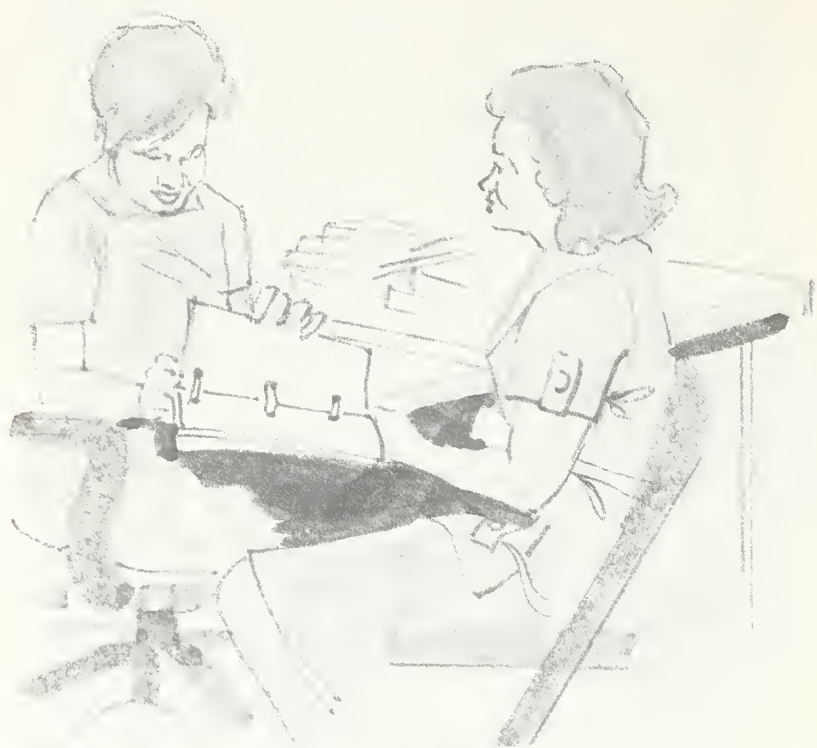


## Aides

Many EFNEP aides come from the communities in which they work. Some are black; some are white, Spanish-speaking, or Indian. Many know what it is to be poor.

Alice has four children. Her husband lost his job and they were on welfare when Alice was hired to work as an EFNEP aide. With other new aides, she learned to plan nutritious and economical meals and shop wisely. She learned to manage her resources so that she could help others manage theirs. And she learned about the rules of food safety and sanitation.

This was Alice's first job and the money she earned helped her family through a difficult time. Now her husband is working again and the family has moved to a better home. Alice has completed her high school education. Alice is well qualified to help other homemakers; she's proven that she is able to help herself. And there are thousands more like her in EFNEP.





## Volunteers

Thousands of adult and teenage volunteers help Extension professional educators with the EFNEP teaching job.

Some of the volunteers were once enrolled in EFNEP and now teach nutrition to other adults and youth. Many help to set up meetings, enroll new homemakers and youth in the program, and serve as members of community advisory groups.

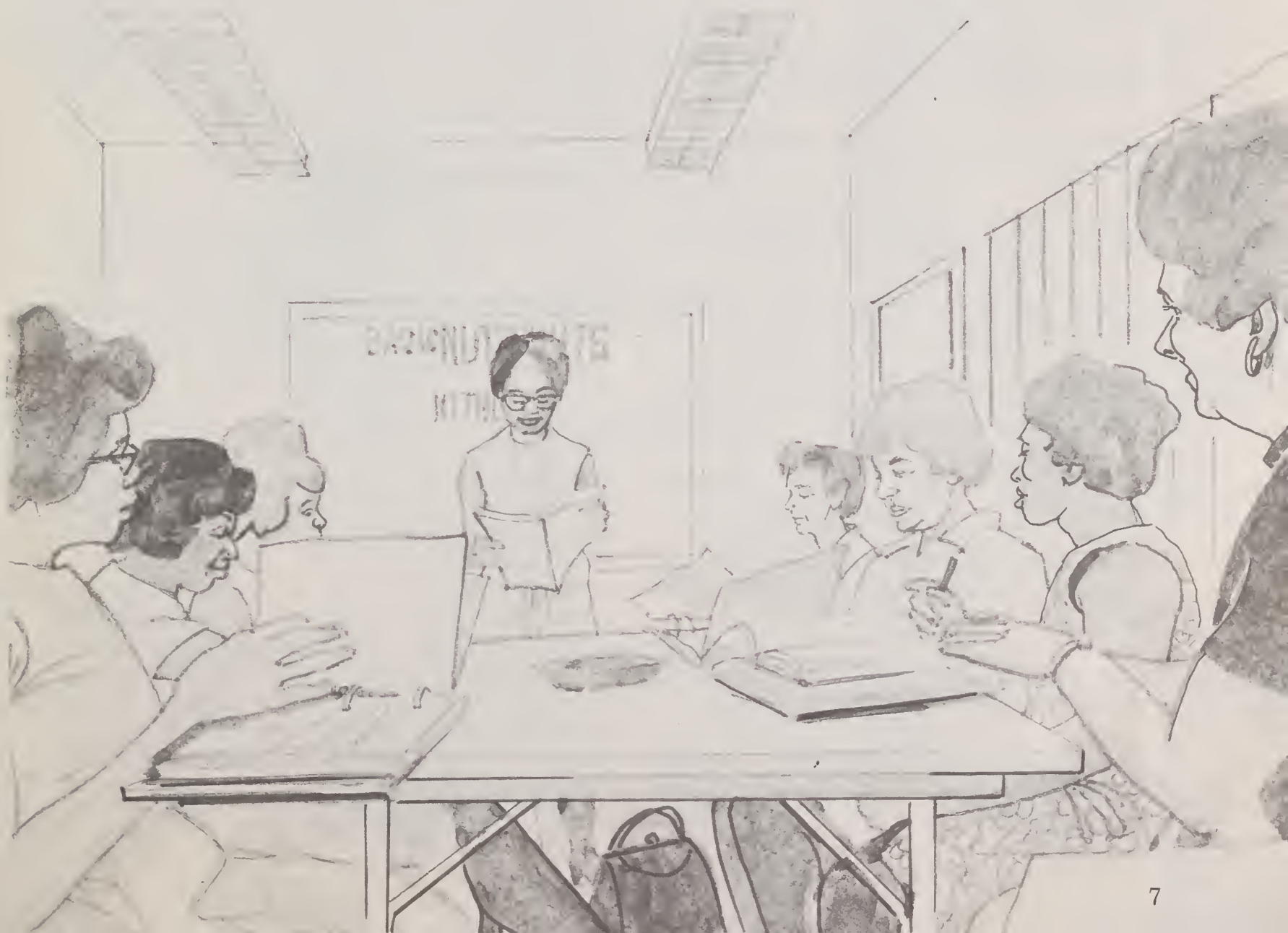
While many volunteers are recruited from EFNEP, some come from Extension homemaker groups. These women have developed skills and knowledge they can share with others.

## Agents Who Supervise

EFNEP home economists and 4-H youth professionals are experienced employers and recruiters with a keen eye for potential aides and volunteers, and a tested plan for training and supervision. EFNEP is an integral part of their total Extension program.

For many home economists and 4-H youth professionals, EFNEP is a full-time job. A local EFNEP unit may have as many as 20 to 25 aides or volunteers.

Sometimes aides are trained by telelecture. For example, a State nutritionist may train aides using closed circuit TV and telephone equipment. Other training methods include meetings and field trips. Aides usually receive three weeks of initial training, followed by on-the-job training.



# EFNEP: PROGRAM ON THE MOVE

## Purpose and Objectives

EFNEP is designed to improve the dietary levels of low-income families and youth through education and the improved use of resources.

The EFNEP aide concept was pilot-tested in several States before the national program was funded. States feel that hiring paraprofessionals has proven its worth and helped to strengthen Extension's programs for all audiences.

EFNEP aides help low-income families:

- Improve their diets.
- Learn the importance of nutrition.
- Use community resources to meet their needs.
- Use and care for kitchen equipment needed for food preparation and storage.
- Learn food safety, health, and sanitation practices.
- Learn how to manage food money and other resources such as food stamps.
- Learn how to improve family relationships related to diet and nutrition.
- Learn how to garden and preserve food for family consumption.

In the 4-H EFNEP youth program, volunteers:

- Provide education for youth in the principles of nutrition, diet, and use of foods.
- Contribute to the personal development of disadvantaged urban youth.
- Contribute to the improvement of family diet and nutrition through educational programs for youth.

## Funding

Recognizing the need to provide nutrition education to low-income families in an intensive program, the U.S. Department of Agriculture allocated \$10 million in November 1968 to the Cooperative Extension Service for EFNEP. These funds provided for hiring aides for individual and small group teaching.

States received funds on the basis of their low-income population. The Office of Economic Opportunity formula for poverty in the United States determined this figure. State Extension Services then selected program sites.

In 1970, Federal legislation provided funds for a concentrated effort to reach youth from depressed city areas through 4-H.

Congress has increased the annual funding for EFNEP to \$50 million. With Federal, State, and local support, EFNEP has become a vital part of the Extension program.

## Teaching Methods

The one-to-one approach is the basic teaching method of EFNEP. Aides sometimes knock on doors to locate homemakers; other times, neighbors or local agencies refer them to homes. Their job—once they get past the front door—is to help homemakers improve their diets and those of family members.

Many teaching tools have been developed to help aides in their work—nutrition lesson plans, simple handout leaflets, and small flip charts. In addition, many States use small slide or film-strip projectors, lending a "television effect" to their teaching.

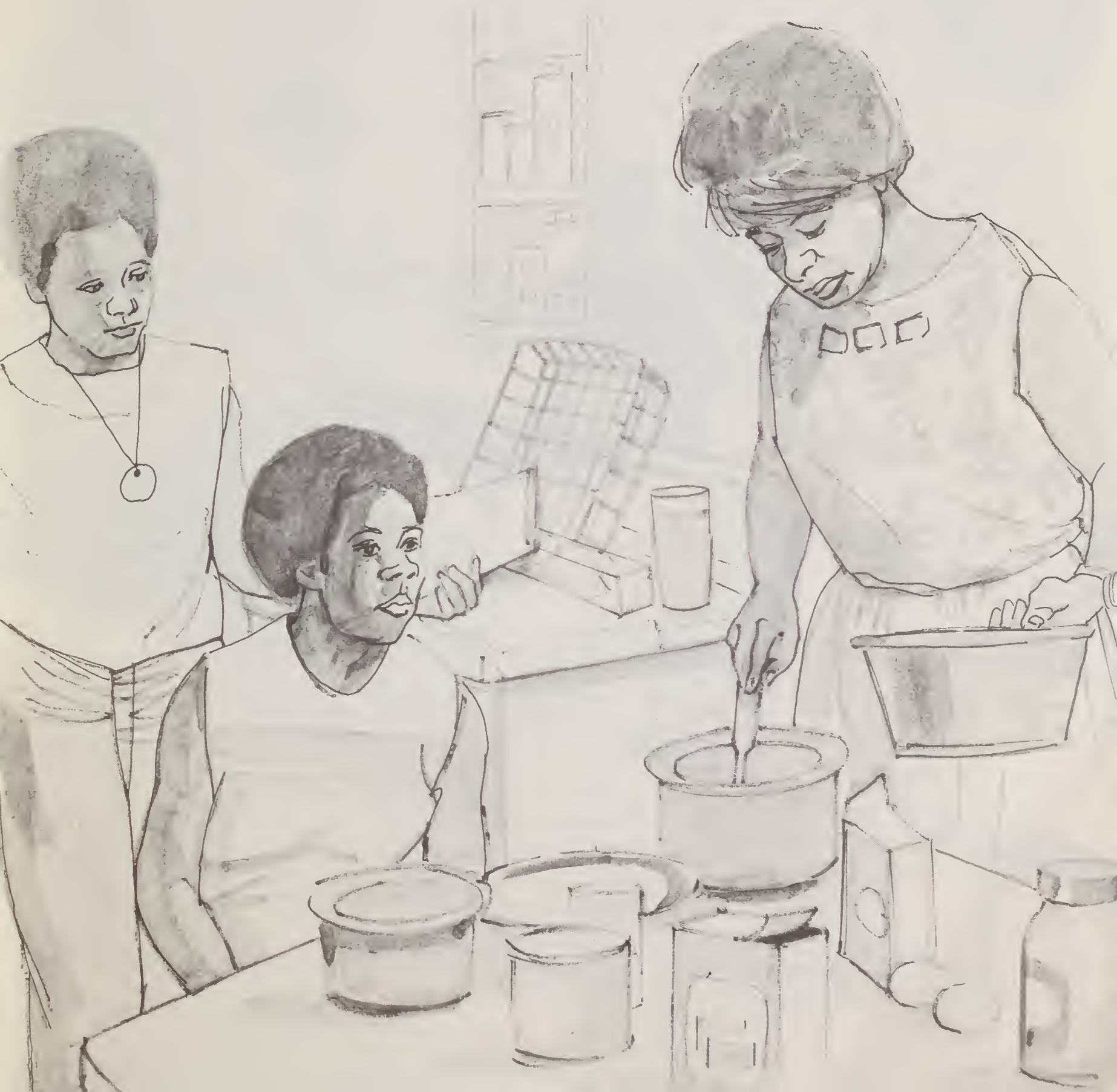
Once homemakers show they have learned from the one-to-one teaching experience, aides encourage them to join small groups.

Low-income youth learn about nutrition through organized 4-H clubs, special interest groups, mass media, self-study programs, day camps, and workshops. Volunteers sometimes use games such as nutrition bingo to teach youth. They also:

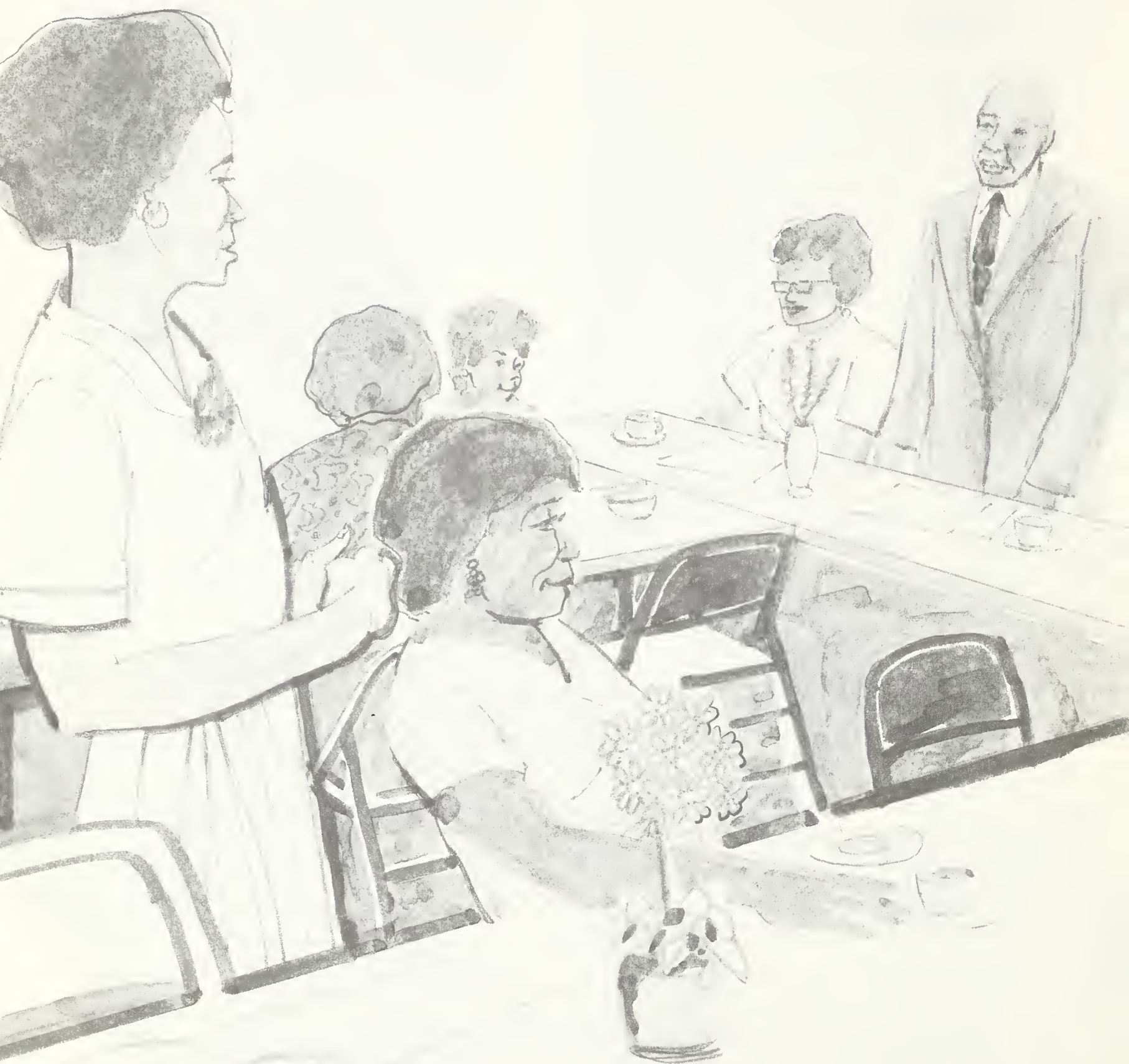


- Produce nutrition skits and puppet shows.
- Plan visits to farms, food processing plants and grocery stores.
- Encourage youngsters to grow their own vegetables.
- Teach youth to prepare food in ways that preserve nutrients.

"Mulligan Stew," a 4-H nutrition education television series developed by EFNEP, has enrolled more than two million young people in 25 States. This six-part series teaches 9-12 year-olds about nutrition through the adventures of the "Mulligan Stew" cast of five zany kids. Every month more States are showing this television series, making nutrition factual and fun for the children they enroll.







## Community Support

No community program can successfully exist without close working relationships with other local family-related agencies. From the beginning, EFNEP has sought the cooperation and support of others.

In many communities, EFNEP home economists have established resource groups made up of people from local health departments, welfare offices, church groups, legal aid, food assistance programs, schools, or other organizations. These groups discuss low-income family needs, and members may assist in training EFNEP staff.

County advisory groups from the target audience help with EFNEP program planning in most States.

## Evaluation

Once aides establish working relationships with homemakers, they ask the homemakers what they have eaten during the previous 24-hour period. They also ask for information

about family members, monthly income, and food expenditures. After this information has been obtained, the homemakers are enrolled in EFNEP. This information helps the aide begin her teaching.

Every six months aides take "food recalls," asking homemakers what they have eaten in the past 24 hours. Aides then record the number of times items from each of the four food groups were consumed during the day. Food recalls are compared to evaluate changes in practices.

USDA's Economic Research Service and an independent research firm examined and evaluated EFNEP. They found the program meeting its objectives.

Through EFNEP, homemakers have become more aware of their families' needs for milk, fruits and vegetables; more aware of other protein sources besides meat; and more aware of how to use USDA food assistance programs. Some homemakers are able to reduce their food expenditures by \$5 to \$10 per week. Because of EFNEP, thousands of low-income families and youth are now eating more nutritious meals.



## WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT EFNEP?

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